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CHAPTER 9

THE GREENING OF EVENTS: EXPLORING FUTURE TRENDS AND ISSUES

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FUTURE POINTS

- There is a growing trend towards green events, with a number leading the way in terms of adopting, promoting and encouraging sustainable practices.
- This chapter considers whether this trend will continue into the future, using a scenario planning approach focused on the year 2050.
- Three case studies of events which have won awards for their sustainable best practice are provided to illustrate the current situation.
- Four scenarios are developed, as potential futures, based on eight identified drivers.

INTRODUCTION

A growing number of events are incorporating *green* practices and objectives within their business planning (Laing and Frost 2010). This includes adopting environmentally sustainable practices and initiatives such as recycling, a small carbon footprint for venues and waste management. There is also a trend towards utilising events to promote green and sustainable issues, directing persuasive messages towards attendees. Both of these types of developments are partly the result of pressure from sponsors, funding agencies and other key stakeholders or the need to comply with regulatory requirements. In other instances, they reflect the strongly-held environmental values and ethos of organizers or managers. Some events have attracted plaudits and awards for their efforts in achieving sustainability.

At present, events are seen as being in the vanguard of sustainability and green issues. In this chapter, the term *green* is used as a synonym for sustainable, while *greening* refers to an 'investment in environmentally friendly facilities and practices' (Mair and Jago 2010: 78). Many examples of events promote good environmental practice and encourage participants to change their behaviour and the world. However, this raises an important question of whether or not this trend will continue. If events are green at the moment, does that mean they also will be in the future?

Our aim in this chapter is to explore whether the phenomenon of greening associated with events is sustainable. To achieve this, our chapter is divided into three parts. The

first details the current state of play, examining three contemporary events that have won awards for their sustainability. These are in the forefront of best practice and represent the direction that events are seemingly headed in at the moment.

The second and third parts of the chapter discuss the future for greening of events, using a scenario planning approach. Rather than speculating about one possible future, scenarios are a narrative or description of multiple futures (Yeoman, Galt and McMahon-Beattie 2005), based on various drivers, which are a mechanism to suggest how change might occur (Yeoman 2012). Accordingly, these provide future possibilities, rather than a set prediction. In the second part of the chapter, we present eight socio-political drivers of future change. Utilising these drivers, in part three we suggest four possible scenarios to provoke and guide discussion of the future.

Using the example set by Yeoman (2012), the year chosen for our scenarios is 2050. This provides enough time (roughly two generations) for a more creative approach to scenario planning, where we indulge in open-minded, blue skies thinking about what possible futures might look like. It must be emphasized that these are not predictions but imaginings of what might happen based on the drivers. Following Bergman, Karlsson and Axelsson (2010), we have adopted *science fiction* as our ‘paradigm of thought’. This refers to forecasts ‘which make explanatory claims, but not truth claims’ (Bergman, Karlsson and Axelsson 2010: 857). Our scenarios are meant to be imaginative, playful, and unconventional, as the aim is to challenge accepted modes of thought and lift readers out of their comfort zone.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

It is important to understand the current state of play in regards to events, as this provides a starting point and will allow comparison with the future scenarios. The successful management of events is increasingly distinguished by the ability to recognize and manage the *triple bottom line*, covering economic, social and environmental impacts (Hede 2007; Laing and Frost 2010), or even a quadruple bottom line, which also considers the impacts of corporate governance (Richards and Palmer 2010). However, it is clear that the economic impact of events has taken preference in research terms, and also in terms of the interests of event organizers and stakeholders (Laing and Frost 2010). While research has certainly examined both the impacts of events on local residents (Fredline, Jago and Deery 2003) and the impacts of events on the environment (for a full discussion, see Laing and Frost 2010), there remain significant gaps in our knowledge. For example, in terms of the environment, we are generally well aware of the practical steps that may be taken to improve the environmental performance of an event (see for example Jones 2012). However, we have relatively little knowledge of the impact that attending environmentally friendly events may have on attendees. Further, research on the impact of events on local residents has mainly focused on issues such as noise and overcrowding (Fredline, Jago and Deery 2003). We do not have the same level of understanding about the positive impacts of events in terms of social capital and social cohesion (exceptions include Arcodia and Whitford 2006; Wilks 2011) or their effectiveness in promoting persuasive messages (Frost and Laing 2013).

Events are staged for numerous reasons, including celebrating special dates, or the passing of time; for social benefits; for entertainment and escapism; for religious reasons; celebrating or showcasing cultural; acting as a focus for business; reflecting special interests; to encourage tourism; to raise money and awareness for charity and causes; and sometimes simply to make a profit (Frost and Laing 2011; Getz 2005). Therefore, raising environmental awareness, and changing environmental behaviour may not be key parts of the objectives of staging an event. However, as noted earlier, the opportunities offered by mass gatherings to target and reach large numbers of people at the same time mean that events can be viewed as potential learning spaces (Mair and Laing 2012; Frost and Laing 2013). It is proposed that there are three main elements of educational content at events – to raise awareness, to encourage behaviour change as part of a larger campaign, and to use the festival or event to play an advocacy role. Events are sometimes held as part of a larger social marketing campaign to underline a particular message which is aimed at behaviour change (Andreasen 1994). This type of social marketing is more often seen in the health promotion area, where attendees are exposed to numerous behaviour change messages – for example the importance of healthy eating. Finally, and most relevant to this chapter, many event organizers feel very strongly that part of their role and responsibility in organising an event is to emphasize issues that are personally important to them (Mair and Laing 2012).

To illustrate how contemporary events develop and utilize their green credentials, we consider three events which have won awards for sustainability. These are Bluesfest (Byron Bay, Australia), City of London Festival (UK) and the Manchester Festival (UK). Interviews were conducted with organizers or directors of each event. In all

three case studies it is clear that the personal values and ethos of these individuals plays a significant role in driving the educational component of their events, leading to the events themselves becoming advocates for certain types of behaviour change.

Festival Vision

Bluesfest was one of the first music festivals in Australia to make greening an important part of the event, in the 1990's, at a time when green issues and recycling were not commonplace at mainstream events. The organisers feel very strongly that they have a responsibility to educate event patrons as 'we have a waste-wise message going out there ... and you do see that the place is relatively neat and clean'.

Sustainability does not stop at being green but 'you've also got to talk about fair trade and you've also got to talk about social justice'. Bluesfest has also purpose built their own venue site as a green community.

The City of London Festival takes a more pragmatic approach to greening, noting that 'sustainability is not just in terms of how we manage our events or run our office – you know, the practical levels – but also very strongly feeds into our artistic programming'. The desire to spread a message is also very visible here: 'We try to make attendees aware of what we are doing and why we are doing it'. This is tinged with an awareness of the scale of what they are trying to do: 'It's an ongoing process of trying to shift attitudes ... hopefully as time goes by we could be chipping away at it a bit and be more successful'. The City of London festival runs in 62 venues and so attitudes towards greening vary between the venue managers. At times, the

educational component of the City of London Festival is aimed as much at the venues and suppliers as at the attendees.

The prominence given to greening in their vision by the Manchester Festival shows how important sustainability is to them, including financial sustainability: ‘We aim to be among the best international arts organizations in the world, and we aim to make the festival a sustainable event financially and sustainably [green]’. This prominence comes again (as is the case for Bluesfest) from the festival director: ‘sustainability is championed by our director...we try to make sure it gets into the mindset of those who are working with us’. The Manchester Festival aims their education and advocacy at both the suppliers and the attendees:

‘we try to advocate for sustainable event management amongst the sector in the city. We attach a series of guidelines to all of our suppliers which kind of says, here is what we mean by sustainable event management’.

Social Capital and Social Inclusion

For all three events, a social dimension is seen to be entwined with sustainability and environment goals. Festivals are often staged for broad social goals (Finkel 2010; Frost and Laing 2011; Wood 2005). It is believed that attendance at events can create social networks which are helpful in the creation of social capital (Van Ingen and Van Eijck 2009). Arcodia and Whitford (2006) argue that festivals may facilitate the development of social capital in three main ways. They build community resources, encourage social cohesiveness and give people opportunities for public celebration.

O'Sullivan and Jackson (2002) also suggest that leisure and events should be seen as a form of social integration, providing opportunities for social advantage and improving self-esteem. Social inclusion might be a potential outcome of a festival, in the sense of 'engaging sections of the community not commonly participating in community and political activities' (Johnson, Currie and Stanley 2011: 69), or breaking down barriers and building strong communities (Derrett 2003; Finkel 2010). A festival might also be an expression of acceptance of diversity or a focus for an otherwise marginalized group within a community (Gorman-Murray 2009). Finkel (2010: 277) points out that it is often these social inclusion goals or benefits 'that are a source of pride for organizers and a reason they decided to become involved in the festival in the first place'. Many local festivals are free or charge nominal entry, giving greater access to lower socio-economic groups to cultural activities (Arcodia and Whitford 2006; Carlsen, Ali-Knight and Robertson 2007). Community involvement in volunteering, where people mix with others across a wide spectrum of backgrounds and interests, might also lead to greater social inclusion (Finkel 2010), encouraging interaction across social strata, ethnic background and gender divides.

For Bluesfest, social justice is at the heart of the festival: 'We started by presenting blues music – that's the music of oppressed people! And we've extended what we do into having ... indigenous Australia and Pacific Rim music'. As one interviewee said: 'How do we represent to people the different cultures that come from where we live? How in modern day Australia do we represent ourselves as being reflective of our community and our aspirations?' For Bluesfest, the issues of the local community are less obvious at the festival than the issues of fair trade and social justice.

The City of London Festival has an outreach program that targets the local community, particularly children, with the aim of upskilling people, and giving them opportunities to showcase their work. However, they also feel that they play a wider role in encouraging people (locals as well as visitors) to use facilities within the City of London: 'It's about bringing people in, showing them the diversity, the history and the architecture as much as it is about the artistic works we put in the program'.

The Manchester Festival prides itself on the way it reaches out to the local community, making them a part of the celebration whether they physically attend the events or not: We run a community box office, with local cultural regeneration officers and some other partners, to offer tickets at a discounted rate across all of the festival shows to people who had some barrier to entry. We also deliberately made one third of the program free so that more people could attend elements of the festival. We also did a live relay of some of our events so that people who couldn't attend could still take part.

The festival also has a large volunteer program, involving around 330 volunteers who are part of the local community, and several of these volunteers have gone on to find full time careers as a result of the opportunities that they had whilst volunteering.

DRIVERS

The events detailed above have developed in response to beliefs, issues and conditions at play in their current circumstances, which are – in essence – the drivers of what we have today. However, as we look towards 2050, these drivers may be

modified and others may become more prominent, reshaping society. We propose a series of eight drivers that we believe may have a strong influence on the green events of the future. These drivers are based on extant literature (not confined to events), our current research on events, and accepted knowledge. They shape the scenarios depicted in the third part of the chapter.

1. Economic and Demographic Inequities

The rich countries get wealthier, the poorer countries get poorer. The division continues to get sharper (Sheehey 1996). Less developed countries are beset by over-population. Within them there is also a sharp divide between rich and poor, although a growing middle class is emerging in countries like India and China (Andrew and Yali 2012; World Economic Forum 2009), who are often Western educated and aspire for a better standard of living and access to consumer goods, particularly new technology. Environmental issues are viewed as less important than in the developed world. Consequently, the drivers and scenarios of green events considered here are very much placed in the context of the developed world.

2. Increasing Urbanization

Almost 70% of the developed world now lives in urban settings (Yeoman 2012). This phenomenon is also seen in developing countries, notably many parts of Asia, where the growing middle class seek the employment benefits and breadth of amenities that a city provides. A move towards urbanization is likely to continue through to 2050, with the rise of China and India as world powers. Urbanization may result in an increasing desire and need to escape crowding and seek peace and quiet, underpinning interest in green spaces and a realization of its fragility and value to society. It may

also fuel a growing environmental consciousness, referred to below, paradoxically as people become less connected to the natural world. City-based events might become more frequent, catering to the bulk of the population. Conversely, the lack of natural surrounds in everyday life might lead to an increasing interest in attending events held in rural or regional settings.

3. Existential Authenticity

The quest for personal growth and fulfilment is often characterized as the desire to find one's authentic self, a concept labelled existential authenticity (Wang 1999; 2000). This occurs at a time when some are turning away from organized religion and seeking spiritual sustenance elsewhere. Self-help tomes have their own shelves in bookshops and regularly hit the best-seller list, catering for an audience desirous of finding themselves but also to be the 'best' version of themselves they can be. At an intra-personal level, there are two aspects of this phenomenon: 'bodily sources of authentic self' and 'self-making' (Wang 2000: 67). Thus 'intense relaxation or recuperation, excitement, fun, and sensation seeking, can become the source of feeling authentic' (Voigt 2009: 81). Authenticity can also result from the achievement of self-awareness and identity construction (Laing, Voigt and Frost 2014). At an inter-personal level, existential authenticity exists where interaction with others engenders a sense of being one's true self. Social engagement fosters a sense of self-worth and self-esteem, associated with being valued by others.

4. Environmental Consciousness

Rather than being constant, this ebbs and flows. Particular newsworthy incidents, such as chemical spills, nuclear accidents and extinctions, lead to heightened interest.

At other times, economic and political issues may lead to a decline. At times there is a general scepticism, particularly when examples of *green-washing* (false claims of ecological standards) gain publicity. While the concept of climate change has its detractors, there is mainstream acceptance amongst the scientific community and the general public that human intervention has had a deleterious effect on elements of climate leading to changes in temperature, rainfall, wind and the incidence and extent of severe storm activity resulting in natural disasters (Scott, Simpson and Sim 2012). Raising awareness of the effects of human behaviour on the environment may be the aim of certain events, and this may be working to 'normalise' green behaviour. Some events are held by local governments, primarily to raise awareness of certain issues, for example climate change and the importance of pro-environmental (or green) behaviour (Verplanken and Wood 2006). Other events are not themed around the environment but include some educational content on sustainability, often in the form of stalls providing information, or seminars and hands-on workshops (Laing and Frost 2010).

5. Regulatory Paradigm

Public policy is driven by Neo-Classical economic thought. In particular, international and domestic schemes to address environmental issues follow the paradigm of changing behaviour through financial penalties. Carbon trading, for example, taxes polluters and encourages countries and individual companies to take action to reduce their emissions. In turn, low polluters claim a credit, which they can sell. The prevalence of greenwashing amongst organizations has led to regulatory action in many countries to prevent claims that are difficult to verify or substantiate, exaggerations of the environmental benefit of products or services and the use of

vague terms like ‘eco-friendly’ or ‘earth-friendly’ (Kewalramani and Sobelsohn 2012; Laing and Frost 2012; Mair and Laing 2012).

6. Green Communities

Throughout Western countries, there is a trend towards small communities that identify themselves as green. They also identify themselves as Creative, Innovative and Alternative (Florida 2005). Often named as *Villages*, they are clustered in two locations. The first is in inner-city neighbourhoods with nineteenth century building stock. The second is in rural areas close to major cities, usually with natural amenities such as fertile soil, stable rainfall or attractive scenery. These communities are close-knit and pride themselves on being tolerant, politically savvy and culturally sophisticated. They are home to many small businesses and syndicalist enterprises – typically cafes, food stores, bars, retail and artisanal. Paradoxically, many of the inhabitants work in cities for governments or large corporations and these communities provide the opportunity to live out an alternative identity. These communities are at the forefront of green thinking and innovation.

7. Growth in Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility or CSR ‘is a term increasingly employed to denote ethical behaviour with respect to various shareholder, employee, consumer, supplier, and competitor stakeholder groups’ (Dwyer and Sheldon 2007: 92). CSR often requires a balancing act, to address various needs and interests (Williams, Gill and Ponsford 2007). As an ethos, it underpins greater use of the triple bottom line approach by companies, where goals developed and outcomes sought are not merely in the financial realm, but also social and environmental. Organizations are

increasingly anxious to be seen to be good corporate citizens (Williams, Gill and Ponsford 2007), not merely to meet the letter of the law. Those that adopt CSR policies may become 'employers of choice' (Deery, Jago and Stewart 2007). CSR arguably drives companies to want demonstrable, socially-desirable results for their sponsorships, and some sponsors will only consider organizations or individuals that are a strong fit with their corporate values and ethical standards (Laing and Frost 2010).

8. Technological Developments

The burgeoning of technology has seen a growth in connectedness through social media tools like Facebook and Twitter. Texting on mobile phones is part of the social fabric and the way many people arrange business transactions and appointments, as well as their social activities. There is more acceptance of the use of technology to receive as well as impart information and less reliance on human contact. Face to face meetings aren't as common in the business world as they once were, often replaced by teleconferences, video-conferences and platforms like Skype (Locke 2010; Weber and Ladkin 2004). Virtual conferences are also increasing in number. They leverage in some cases on technology creating a virtual world such as Second Life. This is seen as a way to address concerns about the environmental impacts of business events, but also accommodates a generation that is generally comfortable dealing online. Hybrid conferences provide the best of both worlds, combining a live segment for those attending in person with an online component, for a virtual audience (McLoughlin 2012).

SCENARIOS

Applying these drivers, we have imagined the following four scenarios for a future 2050. It is important to note that these are not predictions, but rather possible worlds designed to assist in planning processes.

In the *first scenario*, by 2050, mega events, particularly the Olympics and Soccer World Cup, find themselves receiving increasing criticism for tokenism and their failure to live up to claims of ecological responsibility. Corporate excessiveness, breaches of human rights, pollution, waste and a poor record of achievement with respect to green issues, including the legacy left behind once the event is staged, are constantly discussed in the media. As a reaction to the inequities of host city selection, a coalition of perpetual bid losers has formed, utilising their commitment to green issues and past successes in hosting green events as key planks in their platform.

Labelled the Eco-Cities Alliance, they include Detroit, Istanbul, Chennai and Manchester. Arguing that they have *already* resolved their environmental problems, they claim it is their turn to share in the spoils of these mega events. Bidding for joint staging, they promise a new approach. Tellingly, they claim they will dramatically reduce the share of tickets going to sponsors and will focus instead on social inclusion. For the first time, tourism has been dropped as a means of attracting public funding, with the emphasis on providing for local people first. Technology is used to make more people feel connected to the event, and hybrid events are presented as a solution to the cost of staging mega events. Unsuccessful in their bid for the 2056 Olympics, they have promised to persevere.

The *second scenario* sees a role for events in addressing environmental concerns. After the Maldives finally disappear below the waves in 2046, as a result of rapidly increasing sea level rises, all doubts about the seriousness of climate change disappear. Mitigation of further greenhouse gas emissions becomes crucial, and novel ways to take action at an individual level become apparent. The device of selling tickets through a combination of money and individual carbon credits is pioneered by a number of popular music performers. This works effectively because potential fans are aware of and in tune with the environmental concerns of these stars, particularly through social media. The part payment through carbon credits demonstrates commitment and the credits raised are utilized for projects in the developing world. Hybrid events are regularly staged, reducing carbon emissions. Events, like other businesses, are highly regulated in relation to their environmental footprint, and must comply with a broad range of legislative requirements aimed at reducing and even eliminating their negative impacts on the environment. Most events exceed these requirements, conscious of their importance in minimising future environmental damage.

The *third scenario* sees events as platforms of social change. Local festivals staged by green communities continue to be innovative, both in terms of technical and educational activities. By 2050, their focus has become much more outward looking. These green communities, such as those in Byron Bay, Manchester and parts of London have already reached high levels of environmental excellence. Their use of motorized transport is very low and they have very high rates of recycling and the use of sustainable energy. Indeed, by this stage very little can be done to improve upon these. Accordingly, these communities have become more evangelical, utilising

partnerships and social media to spread environmental education. Their festivals are used as platforms for persuasive messages. They aim to advocate for social and environmental change at all opportunities. The opportunities offered by mass gatherings to target and reach large numbers of people at the same time mean that events are increasingly potential learning spaces.

In the *fourth scenario*, mega events are not sustainable by 2050. Future economic collapse has precipitated the demise of large scale mega and global events like the Olympics. Bankrupt economies can no longer afford them. Greece, whose modern economy was partly ruined by the Olympics is an early example, but the problem spreads. As a reaction there is a shift to an increasing emphasis on smaller local events to fulfil the basic needs of entertainment, bringing people together, and commemorating anniversaries, as well as making people feel more authentic, through discovering their roots and a sense of identity. Even then, many regional festivals (such as Bluesfest, London and Manchester) are put under pressure by declining sponsorship and government funding. This throws into question their ability to act as spaces for facilitating community and social cohesion. They must use technology such as social media more extensively and creatively, in order to create those feelings of connection and a sense of identity.

The following Table 9.1 summarizes the four scenarios above and links each of them to the drivers referred to in the previous section.

Table 9.1. Linkages Between Scenarios and Drivers

Scenario	Drivers
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Multi-city bids for mega events	1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8
Events play an integral part in addressing and even helping to solve environmental concerns.	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
Events used as platforms for social change and learning spaces.	3, 4, 6, 7, 8
The demise of mega events and a consequential focus on smaller community events.	1, 2, 3, 6, 8

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The implications of these scenarios for the future of the event industry based upon the present are four-fold.

Firstly, global economic forces may have the greatest impact on events, particularly mega-events, which require massive amounts of underwriting by governments and are increasingly expensive to stage and attend. Individuals may not be able to afford the high entry prices, particularly when the online streaming is such a high quality and provides the flexibility and convenience of watching the event when one chooses. The role of the big screen in the town square may become more important than attending the actual event. This may lead many mega-events to turn away from a focus on the tourist dollar, towards providing social benefits and a green legacy for the local community. These drivers underpin scenarios 1 and 4.

Secondly, the increasing visual evidence of climate change may act as a driver to encourage people to engage in sustainable behaviour more generally and at events more specifically. Many of the arguments currently advanced for why people are loath to act to counter climate change revolve around the absence of visual cues and lack of a sense of being personally affected. There may also be issues of information overload. Events may help to cut through that and play their part as socially

responsible entities, as well as acting as agents of social change. This is the backdrop to scenarios 2 and 3.

Thirdly, there may be increased social capital among those living in places like green communities or villages, involving relatively closed social networks, juxtaposed with greater isolation and exclusion amongst those without access to these strong networks. This may make festivals even more important as spaces for bringing people together and forming the networks needed for healthy levels of social capital. These drivers can be seen at work in scenario 3, where the event becomes an advocate for environmental and social reforms, and in scenario 4, where mega events are increasingly replaced by smaller community events.

Fourthly, changes in technology may help in terms of the environment and limiting greenhouse gas emissions, and will facilitate online or virtual events, but this might come at the expense of the social aspects of attending events. To counter this, there may be a growing realization that face-to-face participation in events may offer greater opportunities for community bonding and the excitement of taking part in a live experience provides a sense of authenticity that many seek in their leisure activities. All four scenarios developed in this chapter acknowledge both the potential and the threat of technology to social inclusion and the creation of community bonding.

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